



Drag Me Along Tours

BAWDY STORIES AND HEARTBREAKING TALES OF SAN FRANCISCO

dragmealongtours.com/index.html

March 30, 2019

Dr. Vincent Matthews, Superintendent
Board of Education Commissioners
San Francisco Unified School District
555 Franklin Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

RECEIVED BY: *AD*

APR 03 2019

SFUSD
SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE

Dear Dr. Matthews and Commissioners:

I am one person, half Native and do not speak for all people, just for myself, not the Choctaw tribe or anyone else; this is my opinion.

Speaking as a historian, an educator, an artist, a citizen balancing personal multi-cultures every day, and as a parent (one of my adopted sons is full-blood Native), this mural brings to the surface a multitude of issues to be addressed that I do not make light of. As educators and loving parents who want to protect our children from the evils in this world, we must ponder the issues carefully for the impact of keeping freedom of expression true for artists and to tell our stories as Americans correctly. In Turtle Island (North America), we are surrounded by a long history of struggles of all people, and whether it be street names, prominent landmarks, statues, monuments, or mascots of sports teams, we are reminded. Not all of history can be dismissed by trying to erase mistakes of the past. We educate with love and understanding. We replace hate with love. We correct and change as we learn what makes sense for the common good of all. Re-naming Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples' Day for example, made sense to me to as a positive change.

Across the street from my house is the public school named after Father Junipero Serra. Every day I am reminded of the 120 year mission era and the genocide of the California Indians. It offends me that he is considered a "saint." Shall we change that school's name for my sake? I am not Catholic, nor were my people killed by him and Gaspar De Portola. The Choctaw were subject to the Indian Removal Act by Andrew Jackson, history calls it the Trail of Tears (1831-1838). Do I not use a \$20.00 bill because his image is on it? What I can do to amend? Get as many \$20.00 bills and donate to Native causes, such as San Francisco's Friendship House for much-needed drug and alcohol

treatment. I can act respectfully to my fellow human beings because I learned long ago the justice, freedom, and education are vital in having a damaged world repaired and in the end prevail.

Concerning the mural: I suggest using it as a teaching point. Place a plaque under it to explain that it exemplifies the attitude of that time, but in no way reflects the policy or dogma of this school. It is a teaching point and evidence that validates the issues of the past.

1) It's historical and depicts the attitude and character of the time it was created. WPA, etc. (similar issues of political correctness came up with Diego Rivera's murals).

2) As a work of art it's style is beautiful and has graphic detail symbols of the genocide, manifest destiny that was in our history. In January 1869, General Phil Sheridan was at Ft. Cobb located at the time in "Indian Territory," now Oklahoma, and he stated "...the only good Indian is a dead Indian." This statement later was repeatedly denied by Gen. Sheridan, but several eyewitnesses agree that he said it and he was known as a bigot and Indian hater. This statement would become synonymous with the Indian policy of most military actions of the time. Fifteen years before he became President of the United States, in New York, in January 1886, Theodore Roosevelt showed the lingering attitude in his quote, "I suppose I should be ashamed to say that I take the western view of the Indian. I don't go so far as to think that the only good Indians are dead Indians, but I believe nine out of every ten are, and I shouldn't like to inquire too closely into the case of the tenth."

3) Reality is, it's an art piece that yes, we can choose to ignore, deface, or paint over the past and replace with something "prettier" or more palatable. I'm reminded of the quote by Isaac Bashevis Singer, "Truth walks around naked and people cover it in the clothes that they are most comfortable with." Art makes us think. It gives her knowledge and evokes feelings, it gives us a lesson of hope to see how far we've come or how much we stay the same, but grateful that we have evolved to understanding.

In my opinion, do not destroy evidence. We can't erase what has happened previously. It is ok to look at the past, but not to stare at it! We learn, we move forward and learn. We don't write history, history writes itself. The mural is historical. In the process of discussion on topics of difference is where the healing begins.

My trust is that collectively the District, the school, the teachers, and parents will reach the most sensible decision in time. We cannot erase what has been, only move forward and learn from the past.

Ome, Yakoke!
(Thank you,)

R.S. /s/

Rick Shelton
Owner, Drag Me Along Tours
dragmealongtours@gmail.com

Dr. Vincent Matthews, Superintendent
Members of the Board of Education
San Francisco Unified School District
555 Franklin Street
San Francisco, CA 94102

RECEIVED BY: *Angela Ouyang*
APR 05 2019
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SUPERINTENDENT'S OFFICE

2019.03.26

BANNED EXPRESSION ERA RETURNS TO SAN FRANCISCO!

San Francisco Educators propose whitewashing history off the face of our local High School

With this proposed act you, the San Francisco Board of Education stands on the verge of becoming the persecutor and destroyer of that which your office obliges you to uphold and defend access to: free and public education for all the uneducated masses that enter your institutions of learning. History should be taught as it happened, not re- "written by the victor", of the day. It is in direct contradiction to the principles laid forth in our city charter:

Preamble:

In order to obtain the full benefit of home rule granted by the Constitution of the State of California; to improve the quality of urban life; to encourage the participation of all persons and all sectors in the affairs of the City and County; to enable municipal government to meet the needs of the people effectively and efficiently; to provide for accountability and ethics in public service; to foster social harmony and cohesion; and to assure equality of opportunity for every resident:

We, the people of the City and County of San Francisco, ordain and establish this Charter as the fundamental law of the City and County.

Today, when freedom of the press is under attack by the highest levels of our government, and truth is distorted to reflect the policies of those holding power over the masses, educators and leaders of educational rights should stand united to teach that we must protect and preserve freedom of any form of expression. Be the form of expression literary, poetic, musical or artistic, or murals reflecting uncomfortable truth through political concepts, they should be protected from censure and destruction, from the moment of their inception throughout the years of history. Thereby fostering a community for social harmony and cohesion; where all feel safe and have had their needs met. Should the Board of Education chose to paint over a historic mural, that action will define you not only as public leaders who: teach our youth a skewed perspective of history; rather you will align yourselves with those silencing the expressive voices who defend the rights to freedom of expression, truthful representation of history *and thereby deny equality of opportunity for every resident*. Should you allow this atrocity to happen you return our educational system to the days of banned books; reminding constituents of your District of the renowned author's whitewashing allegories whose truthful insight earned him a place on the banned book list. ...Arnautoff and Rivera gone the way of banned book author Mark Twain. You as educators will embody a core principle of education – if you forget or choose to rewrite history – you are doomed to repeat it.

In whitewashing the historic mural depicting aspects of our American history you do so in defiance of our city charter, you set precedence directly opposing the rights our city charter endows all of its residents. Viktor Arnautoff, the artists whose Washington High School mural you seek to destroy, studied and painted with the renowned muralist Diego Rivera, presenting viewers controversial ideas and concept in his murals, precisely because the United States defends the liberty that allows him and others that freedom of expression.

"Arnautoff completed several more public murals in the 1930s. His largest project, funded by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and completed in 1936, was a twelve-part depiction of the life of George Washington at San Francisco's new George Washington High School. In the murals, Arnautoff implicitly challenged the version of U.S. history then typical in American high

schools. In depicting Mount Vernon, Arnautoff literally marginalized Washington and put enslaved African Americans in the center of one of the scenes. The mural presented a counter-narrative to most high-school histories of the time, which tended to ignore the existence of slaves at Mount Vernon, as well as the paradox of slaveholders fighting for the principle that all men are created equal. Another large mural presents Washington pointing the nation to the West. Again, however, Arnautoff's counter-narrative makes it dramatically clear that the way west was over the body of a dead Indian.

Painting on the Left: Diego Rivera, Radical Politics, and San Francisco's Public Murals

By Anthony W. Lee

Both muralists', Arnautoff and Rivera's controversial art is embedded in the walls of our cities edifices – Coit tower, Stock Exchange, Presidio Chapel, Washington High School, because our city then, and now, still strives to represent all its residents, as defended in our city charter's preamble.

The Board of Education's proposed action of painting over a historic mural whose political content imparts enduring meaning and current import, reflects a vein of thought and embodies actions dangerously closely resembling the practices of a party not part of our constitution or country. Your actions seek to force conformity of thought silencing, eradicating the voices of the past who fought for individuality, free thinking, free speech, as stated through their expressions in mural art? Painting over the mural is not only destructive of historical art but flirts dangerously close with restricting expression of thought through art expression. It sets a precedence that echoes the dictates of autocracy and is in direct contradiction of not only our city charter but the constitution of the United States government.

"...I had not committed any crime. After all, an artist has as much right to make a political cartoon as any other citizen has to express a political opinion or viewpoint....Members of the Un-American Committee said I am a most dangerous man for the security of the United States [an accurate quotation]....Do they consider an artist's colors, brushes, crayons and pencils as murderous tools? If they do, it is a new low in right-wing thinking, and it is time for the American people—and especially for American artists—to be concerned with a threat that affects everyone as fully as it does me. I value my freedoms, and I intend to defend my rights as a citizen and as an artist, and to express my belief in American principles in the future as I have in the past."

1956 -Victor Arnautoff

Sandstone & Tile Fall 2013 Stanford Historical Society Volume 37, Number 3

In 1955-56 The Stanford Advisory Committee stated

"in the case of Professor Arnautoff, although there is no question but what he is intensely interested in Russia and its problems. This, however, is not illegal. Nor are views which are unorthodox or unpopular. The right of free speech and free thought is a very important part of a strong democracy; it is easy to lose this privilege if we do not defend the right of people to hold views which differ radically from those held by most of us"

Sandstone & Tile Fall 2013 Stanford Historical Society Volume 37, Number 3

What then will your message be to the young minds that your institutions claim to edify? You are free to express only that which conforms to the popular opinions of the day? That despite our city charter, you, The Board of Education will not *"encourage the participation of all persons and all sectors in the affairs of the City and County; ... nor...will you meet the needs of the people ; ...nor ...foster social harmony and cohesion; ...nor... assure equality of opportunity for every resident.*

03.26.2019 Vera Genkin
'79 Lowell High School

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

ARTS ADVOCACY PROGRAM

May 6, 2019

Vincent Matthews, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
555 Franklin Street, Room 301
San Francisco, CA 94102
Tel: (415) 241-6121
Email: matthewsv@sfusd.edu

Dear Superintendent Matthews,

As an organization dedicated to promoting free speech, including freedom of artistic expression, we were concerned to learn that the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is considering removing thirteen 1930s Works Progress Administration (WPA) murals from George Washington High School. Since the murals were created in fresco, their removal can only be achieved by the irreversible act of destroying them. NCAC strongly urges the district to consider the serious ramifications of the irreversible act of destroying an artwork, as well as the precedent it would set for other works installed in San Francisco public schools that could spark strong emotions in the future. We ask the district to leave the murals in place and provide additional context and programming around them.

The Reflections and Action Committee that was convened in order to decide the fate of the murals says they must be removed because their subject matter is disturbing to high school students. This includes images of George Washington's slaves working in the fields of Mount Vernon and images of Washington pointing westward over the dead body of a Native American. While the committee maintains that the work "glorifies slavery, genocide, colonization, Manifest Destiny, white supremacy, oppression, etc.", the murals, created by Russian-American social realist painter Victor Arnautoff, who inserted his progressive views into the work, aim to portray the violence of U.S. history, which is often whitewashed in textbooks, even to this day.

As we re-evaluate painful public visual representations of white supremacy that demonstrate our national legacy of racial divisiveness, we must not confuse political artworks like Arnautoff's with historical monuments intended to send a clear racist message. Arnautoff's murals do exactly the opposite. They provide a counter-narrative to sanitized versions of American history and progress, a version that covers up the fact that American history is

NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association
AICA-USA
American Association of
School Administrators
American Association of
University Professors
American Association of
University Women
American Booksellers for Free Expression
American Civil Liberties Union
American Ethical Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Jewish Committee
American Library Association
American Literary Translators Association
American Orthopsychiatric Association
American Society of Journalists & Authors
Americans United for Separation of Church
& State
Association of American Publishers
Authors Guild
Catholics for Choice
Children's Literature Association
College Art Association
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
The Creative Coalition
Directors Guild of America
The Dramatists Guild of America
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund
Educational Book & Media Association
First Amendment Lawyers Association
Free Speech Coalition
International Literacy Association
Lambda Legal
Modern Language Association
National Center for Science Education
National Communication Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of the Churches
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council of Teachers of English
National Education Association
National Youth Rights Association
The NewsGuild-CWA
PEN America
People For the American Way
Planned Parenthood Federation
of America
Project Censored
SAG-AFTRA
Sexuality Information & Education Council
of the U.S.
Society of Children's Book Writers
& Illustrators
Student Press Law Center
Union for Reform Judaism
Union of Democratic Intellectuals
Unitarian Universalist Association
United Church of Christ
Office of Communication
United Methodist Church,
United Methodist Communications
Women's American ORT
Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance
Writers Guild of America, East
Writers Guild of America, West

inseparable from the genocide of native populations and the brutality of slavery. Surely, this counter-narrative is disturbing, even painful, but destroying the murals will not change the realities of historical violence, on the contrary, it will continue the tradition of suppressing and whitewashing them. As one student writes, "The fresco shows us exactly how brutal colonization and genocide really were and are. The fresco is a warning and reminder of the fallibility of our hallowed leaders." ("STUDENT OPINION: Should School Murals That Depict an Ugly History Be Removed?" *The New York Times* challenge to students, April 15, 2019).

We strongly urge you to consider how destroying of these murals would wipe out not just a reminder of American history, but a reminder of how contested its retelling has been. Exhibiting textbooks from the 1930s, and even much more recent ones, next to the murals would help students understand that history itself is often told to support those in power and erase those who were victimized. Ironically, removing the murals so as to protect the feelings of some viewers may only succeed in keeping slave owning George Washington on his historical pedestal and keep covered the genocidal core of the myth of Manifest Destiny.

The district must not destroy artworks in response to the heightened political tensions of the moment. Art often invites strong emotions and multiple complex interpretations. If we were to remove every artwork that disturbs someone, we would significantly impoverish our public sphere.

We are happy to offer further assistance as needed.

Best regards,



Joy Garnett
Arts Advocacy Associate
National Coalition Against Censorship

Cc:

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